



NIAGARA REGIONAL POLICE SERVICE

Police Service Board Report

PUBLIC AGENDA

Subject: Annual Report – Victims' Assistance
January 1 to December 31, 2024

Report To: Chair and Members, Niagara Police Service Board

Report Date: 2025-06-05

Recommendation(s)

That the Niagara Police Service Board (Board) receive this report for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to advise the Board that the Niagara Regional Police Service (Service) is in compliance with Board By-Law 461-2024 – Victims' Assistance.
- The Chief is required to make a written annual report to the Board with respect to Victims' Assistance.
- This report provides information to the Board for review and consideration of information relating to the Service's response to Victims' Assistance.

Financial Considerations

There are no financial implications relating to the recommendations contained within this report.

Analysis

In accordance with By-Law 461-2024, the Chief shall make a written report to the Board on or before August 30 of each year in respect of victims' assistance. The report shall include:

- a) a summary of the written procedures concerning victims' assistance;
- b) quantitative and qualitative performance objectives and indicators of outcomes relating to police assistance to victims of crime and re-victimization rates in accordance with subsection 39 (1) 3. vii of the CSPA (Community Safety and Policing Act); and
- c) the status of Service compliance with the said procedures.

This Board Report will outline each of the above and confirm compliance with the By-Law.

a) *“...a summary of the written procedures concerning victims’ assistance...”*

General Order (GO) – 115.07 Assistance for Victims and Witnesses was created in response to Board By-Law 461-2024 and Adequate and Effective Policing VA-001 clearly sets out the established procedures related to this By-Law.

The GO contains the following procedures respecting activities related to victims’ assistance:

- Victim Services Niagara (VSN)
- Mobile Tracking Emergency Response System (MTERS)
- Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP)
- Initial Assistance
- Accessing VSN and VWAP
- Communications Unit - responsibilities
- Platoon supervisors - responsibilities
- Inspector of Investigative Support - responsibilities
- Training Unit – responsibilities
- Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) supervisor - responsibilities

Victim Services Niagara

The Service works collaboratively with VSN, a community-based, non-profit organization that assists victims of crime, tragedy, and/or disaster. Once consent is given by a victim (except in cases of death notification), the Service calls the VSN 24-hour Crisis Line to make a request for a team of 2 volunteer crisis responders to attend the scene and provide short-term emotional support and practical assistance to those who are in crisis.

VSN responds to all types of tragic/criminal occurrences at the request of the police and other emergency services, which may include, but is not limited to, abduction, domestic violence (assault), criminal harassment, break and enter, elder abuse, hate crime, homicide, human trafficking, honour violence, motor vehicle collisions, robbery, sexual assault, fire, sudden death, suicide, and threats of suicide.

VSN is responsible for the administration of the Victim Quick Response Program + (VQRP+). The VQRP+ provides short-term financial support toward essential expenses for victims, their immediate family members, and witnesses in the immediate aftermath of a violent crime to help reduce the impact of the crime, enhance safety, and meet immediate practical needs that are a result of the crime. VQRP+ is available to individuals who have no other financial means (e.g., private insurance), where there is no publicly funded program available.

Mobile Tracking Emergency Response System

The MTERS program is facilitated and monitored through VSN. The role of the police in the program is governed by GO 052.07 Mobile Tracking Emergency Response System (MTERS) Program.

This program is a personal alarm system for individuals who are deemed as high-risk victims of domestic violence and other serious violent offences. This alarm system is a GPS device that is carried by the client. Upon activation, the GPS device sends a signal to the EyezOn Alarm System Monitoring Centre, which notifies the Communications Unit of the Service.

Victim/Witness Assistance Program

VWAP is part of the Victim and Vulnerable Persons Division of the Ministry of the Attorney General. VWAP provides services to victims of crime after charges have been laid.

- b) *“...quantitative and qualitative performance objectives and indicators of outcomes relating to police assistance to victims of crime and re-victimization rates in accordance with subsection 39 (1) 3. vii of the CSPA...”*

The Service, as required by Adequate and Effective Policing VA-001 Victims' Assistance, has established procedures to assist victims that reflect the principles of the Victims' Bill of Rights, 1995, and sets out the roles and responsibilities of members for providing victims' assistance. The following summarizes efforts of the Service, in collaboration with its community partners, to remain compliant with the procedures respecting victims' assistance:

Victim Services Niagara

VSN currently has 21 active volunteer crisis responders, 4 full-time employees and 1 part-time employee, which includes the Executive Director, the Victim Crisis Assistance Ontario (VCAO) Program Manager, the VCAO Program Coordinator, the VCAO Program Coordinator Anti-Human Trafficking, and the VCAO Program Administrator. There are 3 part-time after-hours employees that monitor the 24-hour referral line.

In 2024, VSN responded to over 2,132 calls for service and assisted over 2,837 victims of crime and tragedy. Throughout the year, 15,048 follow-up activities were completed. These activities included supportive telephone calls, as well as in-person and on-scene visits. A significant number of VSN calls for service involved domestic violence. Approximately 1,032 referrals were to support victims of domestic violence. As part of the support for victims of domestic violence, 135 new safety plans were completed, and

83 safety plans were revised. Another 633 clients received assistance to address safety issues and concerns.

Volunteer crisis responders provide a critical service and ensure victims in the Niagara Region are provided emotional support and practical assistance on a 24/7 basis. In 2024, over 14,000 hours of service were provided to victims of crime and members of the community.

In 2024, over 1,906 VQRP+ applications were completed to provide financial aid to victims of violent crimes. The most provided coverage under the VQRP+ umbrella includes emergency home safety expenses (lock changes, door repairs), and counselling.

Mobile Tracking Emergency Response System

A committee comprised of personnel from the Service, VSN, and advocates from local women's shelters, meet quarterly to assess and review current MTERS alarm files.

During 2024, VSN had approximately 24 MTERS alarms activated. Statistics relating to the number of responses to MTERS alarms were captured in the Board's Annual Report entitled Domestic/Family Violence.

Victim/Witness Assistance Program

The Service and VWAP continue to work collaboratively in relation to the domestic violence court process. Domestic violence investigators work diligently in referring domestic arrests to VWAP, so that VWAP can meet their mandate of early victim contact. Through this initiative, VWAP staff begins to connect with the victim earlier to offer services and an opportunity to provide input on bail conditions. This ensures increased input from the victim about their safety and their involvement with the criminal justice system. Efforts continue between the Service and VWAP to develop and enhance operational systems to ensure referral compliance.

The Staff Sergeant in charge of DVU regularly attends joint domestic violence meetings. Victims are invited to meet with the specialized Domestic Violence Crown Attorney, police, and a service worker from VWAP, to provide their input and to receive ongoing support and services throughout the criminal justice process. Over 75% of VWAP's caseload involves partner assault.

The Service regularly and actively participates with VWAP on the Domestic Violence Court Advisory Committee, as well as the Regional High Risk Review Team.

Domestic Violence High Risk Review Team - Niagara

The Niagara High Risk Review Team is a case management strategy between the justice partner agencies to access and actively manage high-risk cases involving violence. Most referrals are received from Family and Children's Services (FACS) and Probation and Parole (P&P). Members of the Service, P&P, VWAP, FACS, and Crown Attorneys work collaboratively to prioritize the safety of the victim and their children and to reduce the risk of recidivism. The committee meets monthly.

Interpreter Services

INCommunities offers interpreter services to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, and human trafficking. They also partner with the Canadian Hearing Society to provide American Sign Language services.

Niagara Regional Police / Niagara Probation and Parole

Ontario Ministry of the Solicitor General Correctional Services - Community Corrections / Niagara Probation and Parole (P&P) continue to have an excellent working relationship with the Service. This collaboration has led to enhanced supervision, timely responses to domestic victim-related issues, and increased enforcement for supervision breaches. This in turn increases safety for both the victim and the community in general.

- c) *"...the status of Service compliance with the said procedures..."*

Training

GOs, procedures, and resource information relevant to victims' assistance are available to all members on the IRIS intranet, and accessible by frontline members via Mobile Data Terminals.

Information pamphlets and contact cards for VSN and other service providers are available to all members for distribution to victims during response to calls for service and community contacts.

Notifications of MTERS alarm installations in the community are communicated via the E-Parade portal and delivered to frontline officers at roll-call briefings, with a reminder of procedures and how to access resources available for victims.

A Domestic Violence Investigators Course is scheduled annually and is available to all members of the Service. VSN is an active participant in this training and is included in the syllabus to provide training to frontline officers and communicators.

Domestic violence investigators meet regularly with various community partners. They are active throughout the Region addressing victim and witness issues with Crown

Attorneys, P&P, VWAP, FACS, women's shelters, local services, and community representatives that are responsible for victim and witness-related issues.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Police Service/Board Strategic Priorities

To comply with the provisions of Board By-Laws and to maintain compliance with Adequate and Effective Policing requirements.

Relevant Policy Considerations

- Board By-Law 461-2024 - Victims' Assistance
- GO 115.07 - Assistance for Victims and Witnesses
- GO 052.07- Mobile Tracking Emergency Response System (MTERS) Program
- Adequate and Effective Policing – VA-001 Victims' Assistance

Other Pertinent Reports

8.19 - 2024.07.25 – Annual Report – Victims' Assistance – January 1 to December 31, 2023.

This report was prepared by Matthew Catherwood, Detective Sergeant, Domestic Violence Unit, in consultation with Tara Henderson, Staff Sergeant, Domestic Violence Unit, and reviewed by Chris Lemaich, Inspector, Investigative Support and Dave Masotti, Superintendent, Investigative Services. Recommended by Mario Lagrotteria, Deputy Chief, Community Services.



Submitted by:

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Chief of Police

Appendices

Not applicable.